

In Old Jamaica



"To the memory of Frank Cundall, O.B.E., F.S.A., historian and author. For forty-six years (1891-1937) secretary and librarian of the Institute of Jamaica. This tablet is erected by grateful and devoted admirers of a scholar whose work made accessible to all in Jamaica a fuller knowledge of their country." This plaque to the memory of Frank Cundall is placed above the west entrance of the Institute of Jamaica.

THE men who lived in old Jamaica were mostly men of action. They had to be, for they had to fight for their living against such natural enemies as disease and hurricanes. They helped to make the Jamaica we live in. We salute them. However, we would know very little about these men of action but for the effort of a very different sort of man — the scholar, Frank Cundall.

Born in England in 1858 and educated at King's College London, Frank Cundall came to Jamaica in 1890 to be the first secretary and librarian of the newly formed Institute of Jamaica for the promotion of literature, science and art. Single-handed over the years Frank Cundall built up a collection of books and other materials dealing with Jamaica, the West Indies, West Africa and Latin America which is only rivalled by the collections of the great museums and libraries of England, Spain, France and the United States.

But Frank Cundall did not only collect books. The scholar too in his own way can be a man of action. Cundall wrote out the results of his studies for the benefit of the public. A count of his books and other writings number fifty. They cover a wide range of topics.

His list of the books and other materials which are available on Jamaica is probably Cundall's most valuable work. The list enables anyone wanting to study the history of Jamaica to know at a glance what printed material is available. Without such a list the difficulties of research would be multiplied.

A very helpful book is his outline of Jamaican history which is so arranged that at a glance you can see what was happening in Jamaica and abroad, at any particular period. Cundall also wrote detailed studies on special periods of Jamaican history: about Columbus's discovery of the island, the Arawaks and the Spanish in Jamaica.

Frank Cundall regarded his history of the Governors of Jamaica as his masterpiece. Starting in the 17th century the history was to cover the 18th and 19th centuries. When Cundall died in 1937 only the volumes dealing with the 17th and the first half of the 18th century were finished.

Jamaica owes to Frank Cundall a great debt. No country, like no person, can ever get to know itself, if it does not know its past. Without Frank Cundall's life work it would have been almost impossible for Jamaica to get to know her past.